

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
STAFF NOTE

Action/Discussion Item:

704 KAR 3:305, Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation (Final)

Applicable Statute(s) or Regulation(s):

KRS 156:160, 704 KAR 3:305, 703 KAR 5:020

Action Question:

Should the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) give final approval to 704 KAR 3:305, Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation?

History/Background:

Existing Policy. The Kentucky Board of Education has identified secondary education as a priority, with the goal that each and every student will attain a high school diploma that credentials him/her as prepared for a next level of education and work. Thus, changes to the current minimum high school graduation requirements are under consideration. During the October 2005 meeting, the Kentucky Board of Education considered a proposal for amendments to 704 KAR 3:305, Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation. At that time, the Board asked Department staff to bring back additional information in December for further discussion on certain points that are listed as bullets below. (A proposal to require basic competency in a world language as a condition of high school graduation was withdrawn by the Department prior to the December meeting.)

- Is there research supporting the introduction of Algebra II and mathematics every year as a graduation requirement?
- If the minimum high school graduation requirements are changed to require a single, rigorous college and work-ready curriculum for all, should an opt-out provision be provided?
- Generally, how will the proficiency or competency be defined for the purposes of performance-based credit?
- Specifically, how will the proposed requirement for demonstrated competency in technology be defined as a high school graduation requirement?
- Will schools have sufficient flexibility in scheduling to incorporate the new requirements without reducing student access to electives?

After considering the information presented in December, the Board determined that additional discussion time was needed at the January 4, 2006, meeting. Further questions were raised by Board members at the December meeting and subsequent to the meeting.

The Department has prepared materials for the January 4 meeting based on these key questions. Appendix A is a schematic that places in context the minimum high school graduation requirements as one component within the broader scope of the refocusing secondary initiative. Related to Appendix A will be an online demonstration at the January 4 meeting of the Individual Graduation Plan and its connection to Go Higher KY. Hard copy shots of the Individual Graduation Plan site (now referred to as an Individual Learning Plan) and a folder from Go Higher KY are part of the materials included with this staff note.

Appendix B is a chart to help guide the discussion through the remaining issues to be resolved and is titled "Issues, Current Policy, Recommendations and Rationale for Proposed High School Graduation Requirements and Proposal to Adopt a Goal for Competency in a World Language". Appendix C is the actual proposed regulation recommended for approval by staff.

Policy Issues:

Timing

The Department recommends that the proposed minimum high school graduation requirements become effective for the graduating class of 2012. Those students are currently in the 6th grade and this timeframe would allow them to work toward the revised requirements throughout middle and high school. The timeframe provides time for teachers and administrators to alter instructional practices to support the new requirements and gives the Department the opportunity to lead a statewide improvement effort.

Mathematics and the Ability to Opt Out

The Department has reviewed the research base and carefully considered the Board's questions. The Department's recommendation is that the Board require three credits (Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II) and mathematics every year and that 704 KAR 3:305 be amended to allow the substitution of Algebra II as an opt out provision under limited circumstances. As proposed, students exercising the opt out provision would continue to receive a standard high school diploma. Should a student's limitations be so severe that he/she is not able to meet the requirement for an appropriate mathematics course substitution, as defined in the administrative regulation, the student would receive a Certificate of Attendance. The Department does not recommend the introduction of another diploma.

In addition to the primary considerations regarding the required credits and the opt out provision, as noted on Appendix A, the Board asked questions that relate to instructional practice and implementation of the changes. As an example, at least two Board members asked questions about what could be done to prevent the design of large-scale systems that end mathematics instruction at the Algebra II level in the senior year and therefore place a cap on students' ability to pursue higher levels of mathematics. The Department believes that this issue is best addressed through the *Program of Studies* and professional development. In addition, the proposed changes to 704 KAR 3:305 require that students

who have completed the required credits in mathematics be provided with additional opportunities that constitute continuous learning and are appropriate to their Individual Graduation Plans. Denying students that opportunity would not comply with the intent of the administrative regulation. The Department did consider the potential impact of requiring Algebra II and a fourth mathematics credit to be earned during the senior year, as a means to mitigate the potential for intentional delay of the course. However, the Department believes that such a requirement would put an undue burden on those students who need more time and supports in mathematics by, in effect, requiring them to double up in mathematics during the senior year. Also, Algebra II content is assessed at the 11th grade and that will provide an incentive for schools to engage students in the content prior to their senior year. As we introduce end-of-course assessments into the high school, two reporting tools will be available, the number of students successfully completing required courses and the results of the exams. We believe there is great power in reporting information to the community and to state policy makers.

English/Language Arts

The Department is revising its October recommendation on English/Language Arts to require the specific courses of English I, II, III and IV. However, the Department does continue to recommend that the requirement that these courses be taken in sequence be removed as part of the revision to the *Program of Studies*.

Social Studies

At the December meeting, Board members raised questions about the possibility of requiring schools to offer U.S. History as a minimum high school graduation requirement. The Department is proposing language in 704 KAR 3:305 to clarify that the content of U.S. History is, and will continue to be, required as a minimum high school graduation requirement through the *Program of Studies* as a component of the “historical perspective” strand within the three required credits. Districts have the ability to require that students take a separate course in U.S. History, but all Kentucky students are and will continue to be required to study that content for credit as a condition of graduation and the content is assessed in CATS. Additionally, end-of course assessments in social studies will include U.S. History.

Physical Education and Health

The Department’s October recommendations did not include a change in the required credits for Physical Education and Health. In December, Board members asked if those requirements should be increased to improve the general state of health of the state’s adolescents and to combat the growing problem of childhood obesity. The Department’s recommendation continues to be that the credit requirements remain as they are. The Department concurs that this is a serious issue but believes that it is one most effectively addressed in other ways and on multiple fronts. Fundamentally, it is an issue best addressed before students reach high school age and should be part of the coordinated school health plan. We are encouraged by the aggressive action of local boards of education to implement comprehensive health programs that span P-12 and include school and community efforts to improve the health of Kentucky’s students.

Other issues

Among the questions submitted by Board members for the January discussion were some that did not fall into the content-specific categories above. Those questions and the Department's response are summarized below:

- Will the new requirements limit the time that students have to devote to electives and especially to career and technical education electives?

Department Response: The current version of 704 KAR 3:305 requires 22 credits (15 specified and 7 electives) for high school graduation. The proposed revisions change neither the number of specified credits nor the number of electives. The Board has expressed concern previously and has heard testimony from students, educators and policy groups about “senior year light” and the “lost senior year.” In December, the Department presented various scheduling options to illustrate the percent of time and the unallocated credits available to students under certain scenarios. The Department believes that there is sufficient unallocated time in the school day to accommodate both the graduation requirements and those other courses and learning opportunities that students need to pursue. The Department concurs that some schools need assistance with planning master schedules to provide additional flexibility and is prepared to offer that assistance.

With regard to career and technical education courses specifically, the Department is pursuing aggressively the design and model implementation of a series of interdisciplinary courses that integrate required academic content with career and technical education studies in an applied and very rigorous way. This effort is going forward in collaboration with the local districts, the Department of Workforce Investment and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Providing students the opportunity to earn multiple credits through one course will provide more flexibility and introduce a higher degree of rigor into career and technical education studies as well as a much higher degree of relevance into academic content.

- Is it prudent to proceed with adopting additional requirements before we have validated end of course assessments for existing graduation requirements?

Department response: The only new requirement being introduced that would be subject to end of course assessments (EOCA) is that for Algebra II. Even if Algebra II were not required as a graduation requirement, the Department would be pursuing development of the EOCA and related diagnostic and formative assessments. Districts continue to endorse and place priority on plans to implement a system of continuous assessment and curriculum alignment in mathematics, from middle through high school, as a systemic approach to raise student achievement in that content area. The majority of districts are already offering Algebra II, but need tools and resources to ensure that the curriculum is calibrated to standards and is placing the student on track to be college and work ready.

World Language

In addition to the discussion about proposed changes to the high school graduation requirements, as summarized above, the Board has requested additional discussion on the proposal to adopt a goal of basic user competency in a world language by 2016.

Moreover, the Department is concerned about the ability of the state and local districts to provide the necessary opportunities for all students to learn a world language. Therefore, we are in conversations at the Education Cabinet level about a multi-agency effort to assure opportunity is available by 2012. At the January 4 meeting, the Board will learn about the essential elements of this design, including the Kentucky Department of Education, the Education Professional Standards Board, KET and the Council on Postsecondary Education targets.

Board members and KDE staff continue to receive numerous comments and inquiries about the proposals around world language. After considering the input from the field, the research and the December Board discussions, the Department has reaffirmed its intention to ask the Board to adopt a goal of basic user competency in a world language by 2016. In addition, the Department is recommending that the focus of this goal be broadened to encompass increased emphasis on international studies, cultural competencies and world citizenship. To be competitive with students from other countries for placement and advancement in postsecondary education and work, students need to attain basic competency in a world language and in the understanding of the global economy and world cultures.

Board members are aware that the Michigan State Board of Education recently adopted new high school graduation requirements and those requirements include two years of a world language. As of this writing, staff is contacting Michigan to secure background information on the discussions surrounding that requirement. That information will be shared with the Board in January.

As a separate agenda item in January, the Board will consider proposed changes to the Commonwealth Diploma. The Board will note that, since world language has been removed from the proposed high school graduation requirements, the Department is proposing to restore the requirement that Commonwealth Diploma candidates earn two credits or demonstrate competency in a world language. Because that requirement is still part of the Precollege Curriculum, the Department believes that it should remain a criterion for the Commonwealth Diploma.

Staff Recommendation(s) and Rationale:

Staff recommends that the Board give final approval to 704 KAR 3:305, Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation as proposed. The amendments to the minimum requirements are just one of the necessary steps within the boarder refocusing secondary initiative that will ensure students reach the goal of being credentialed as prepared for the next level of education and work.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Once *Kentucky's Program of Studies for Kentucky Schools and the Core Content for Assessment* are brought into alignment, the increased rigor required for high school graduation will encourage more high level learning experiences in Kentucky classrooms. These experiences will allow students to reach proficiency within the state assessment system but more importantly be successful in their postsecondary endeavors.

Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:

- District Instructional Support Staff from districts in the Alliance Network (October 12, 2005) - Feedback was supportive of changes, especially the freedom to provide integrated and interdisciplinary courses for students.
- Instructional Support Network (ISN) (October 13, 2005) - Specific feedback focused on implications for implementation of the new requirements. The ISN participants commented on the need for teachers specifically in the areas of world languages and mathematics. They also expressed the need for professional development for teachers and clearer definitions of proficiency for technology and world languages.
- Kentucky Association of Secondary School Principals (November 3, 2005) - The group praised decisions related to increased rigor and flexibility to provide relevant math courses for students in their senior year to increase student success and reduce the need for remediation in postsecondary.
- Interim Joint Committee on Education (November 14, 2005) - Commissioner Wilhoit presented an overview of the proposed changes and responses were presented by a local superintendent and a secondary level guidance counselor.
- Local Superintendents Advisory Council (November 29, 2005) - The members voted unanimously to approve the proposed changes in the regulation with the exception that 2012 be identified as the implementation year instead of 2010.

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